

THE A MDO TIBETAN RDO SBIS *LAB TSE* RITUAL

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ABSTRACT

The origin of a specific A mdo *lab tse* established in 1989, offerings to local mountain deities during the annual ritual venerating the three local mountain deities to whom the *lab tse* is dedicated and their origins, and related activities for a two-to-three-day period annually in summer are described.

KEY WORDS

lab tse, mountain deity, Rdo sbis, Xunhua

PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure One. Stong ri (right) and Dar rgyal's (left) picture displayed on the wall of the Rdo sbis *lab tse* altar (Kelsang Norbu, 2006).

Figure Two. A Gung ye *thang ka* displayed at the 'Dod rtse Village shrine (Kelsang Norbu, 2006).

Figure Three. A Gung ye *thang ka* displayed at the 'Dod rtse Village shrine (Kelsang Norbu, 2006).

Figure Four. A Gung ye picture displayed on the wall of the Rdo sbis *lab tse* altar (Kelsang Norbu, 2006).









INTRODUCTION

The term *lab tse*¹ often refers to a framework into which birch branches and ceremonial, long pieces of wood resembling arrows are placed as offerings to mountain deities. *Gzhi bdag* 'owner of the territory', *yul lha* 'deity of the local territory', and *skyes lha* 'natal deity' are terms Rdo sbis locals use to refer to mountain deities. The term '*yul lha*' indicates a mountain deity protecting a certain area, village, or cluster of villages. *Skyes lha* 'natal deity' is the deity of one's birthplace. After moving to a new location, the natal deity continues to provide protection.² Mountain worship and *lab tse* are an

¹ Different spellings with similar pronunciations are used for this term in literature: *lab tse*, *la btsas*, and *la rtse*. The terms *la tse* and *la btsas* in written Tibetan lack meaning when parsed while *la rtse* literally means 'mountaintop'. Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002:1948) and Zhang Yisun (1993:2747), both prestigious Tibetan dictionaries, use *la btsas*. 'Gyur med (b. 1935, interview), who also prefers this spelling, believes that this word has its roots in Zhang zhung, an ancient culture and kingdom of western and northwestern Tibet associated with Bon. 'Gyur med further says that the following three words are distinguished by location: the altar on a mountaintop is *gye tu*, at a mountain pass is *la btsas*, and the altar at the foot of a mountain is *dpa' mkhar* 'hero's castle'. Based on such taxonomy, the final term is accurate for the focus of this paper in Rdo sbis, however, locals use *lab tse* or *la btsas* (the local pronunciation is the same) as a general term regardless of an altar's location (see Berounský and Slobodník (2003) for a discussion of related terms).

² In nearby Bla brang (Xiahe) in Gansu Province, a family immediately chooses a local *gzhi bdag* as the newborn's natal deity and offers *bsang* if the infant is a boy. The natal deity is then the newborn's lifelong *skyes lha*. Members of a single family may obtain different natal deities. Consequently, one may have a new *yul lha* while retaining the same *skyes lha*. When the author's son was born in Zi ling in 2009, the

integral part of local Tibetan culture.

A *lab tse* ritual and associated ceremonies and beliefs in Rdo sbis are described based on oral interviews and Kalsang Norbu's participation in the Rdo sbis *lab tse* ritual five times. Rdo sbis (Daowei) is a Tibetan township in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. It has an area of approximately 600 square kilometers and is located in a valley surrounded by Gung ye, Stong ri, and Dar rgyal mountain ranges in the south, north, and east, respectively. The name Rdo sbis literally means 'stone tent', derived from a tent-shaped rock in the upper valley.

The *lab tse* in Rdo sbis was established in 1989. Monks and laymen, including government employees and students, participate in the annual *lab tse* ritual. The monks chant and offer ritual offerings to the mountain deities in ceremonies that include chanting, praying for blessings, dispelling illness and disasters, burning *bsang*,³ and offering *mda'* 'ceremonial arrows'⁴ to the deities. This is followed by

infant's maternal grandparents in Bla brang phoned the father early the next day and suggested they choose a *skyes lha* in their home area. With the father's consent, they immediately selected a local deity as the new baby's *skyes lha* and offered it *bsang*. This practice of designating a natal deity soon after birth is not practiced in Rdo sbis where a local deity from whom the whole community seeks protection is automatically viewed as the natal deity of a newborn. There are stories in Bla brang about children without designated *skyes lha* being abducted by evil spirits, evidenced by a child leaving home and playing alone in the mountains for several days.

³ Burning juniper branches with *rtsam pa* 'roasted barley flour' as food for deities. It is believed mountain deities consume food by inhaling the odors of burnt offerings.

⁴ A pine pole ten to fifteen meters in length fashioned into an arrow with a sharp end and fletching made of attached wood boards. The pole and fletching are colorfully painted.

such secular activities as Tibetan musical performances by a professional Tibetan musical team invited from neighboring Tibetan regions,⁵ a horserace, traditional dances and songs, and *la gzhas* 'love song' performances. The monastic community plays an important role in the religious elements of the ritual. The local government invites and pays for invited performers and maintains order as villagers place ceremonial arrows into the *lab tse* frame. A horserace was a part of the entertainment until the late 1990s, when it was discontinued due to the few horses in the vicinity; the horses had been replaced by tractors and motorcycles.

Rdo sbis is located in a valley surrounded by mountains. Gung ye Mountain Range (4,438 meters above sea level) in the southwest runs southeast-northwest; Stong ri (4,095m) in the north runs southeast-northwest, approximately ten kilometers from Gung ye Mountain; and Mount Dar rgyal (4,217m) in the east runs northeast-southwest, connecting Gung ye and Stong ri mountain ranges. The valley runs southeast-northwest and is at higher elevation in the southeast than in the northwest. The Rdo sbis River divides the valley into northwestern and southeastern parts, referred to locally as the sunny side and the shady side, respectively. Several branch ridges extend from the Gung ye and Stong ri ranges, forming small open valleys. Twenty-four villages,⁶ eleven monasteries, and one nunnery⁷ are

⁵ The Gesar Singing Group (Ge sar nang ma; Gesa'er yanyi zhongxin) from Zi ling was invited and performed in 2005, 2006, and 2007. About eight singers sang traditional and modern songs in both Tibetan and Chinese for two days during each of these years. Performers were not invited in 2008 and in 2009.

⁶ Lcang shar, Hor ron po, Hor grol ba, Ser grong, Khis dmar, Dgu rus, Stod ra, Mdo ba, 'Obs dmar, 'Obs dmar mdo, Gter kha lung, Zam tshang, Nya mo, and 'Ong rgyal in the north; and Sprel lung, Nyin pa, 'Dod rtse, Ra skor, Bla ma'i lung ba, Sde sman, Gshong ba, Rgyal tshang, Dmag dpon, and 'Dan ma in the south.

located in these valleys as well as in the main valley near the river. The mountain deities' names are the three mountains' names (Stong ri, Dar rgyal, and Gung ye) and are important local protectors. Individual villages may also venerate and sacrifice to other mountain deities, e.g., 'O po che in Sprel lung Village; and Bkra rdzas in Bsam tshang and Bong rgya villages. In general, while these three mountain deities are shared deities for the region, villages often consider the geographically nearest deity to be their own particular protector. Those in the east near Dar rgyal venerate and seek help from Dar rgyal, Gung ye is venerated by villages in the south, and Stong ri is worshipped by villages in the north.

Sacrificing to mountain deities is a required community event during which attendants pray for good harvests, abundant livestock, peace, and prosperity. The event also is a grand regrouping in ethnic and local identity with natives living outside the region returning to maintain ties and reconnect with their natal area. Establishing a harmonious relationship between the three mountain deities encourages people to minimize internal conflict and reaffirm social and communal solidarity.

Attendants wear Tibetan clothes, socialize, and enjoy themselves in numerous informal gatherings. Singing love songs is particularly favored by teenagers and young adults. In late afternoon, youths gather, frequently in gender groups by villages, on meadows near the river and sing love songs. Usually a group of men from one village sings with a group of women from another village in a competition in singing rather than an expression of real love, although the content of the love songs is romantic. Young men search for sexual partners during these nights.

⁷ Rdo sbis grwa tshang, Lcang shar, Bis ri, Ngo ma, Gter kha lung, Nya mo, Sprel lung, Rtsi rkyang, 'Dod rtse, Gdong sna, and Dmag dpon, and 'Dan ma chod rten kha Nunnery.

ORIGIN OF STONG RI, DAR RGYAL, AND GUNG YE

Stong ri

The meaning of the name of this mountain varies according to its spelling. Tshe tan zhabs drung (1987:789-790) writes:

The mountain Dung ri (Conch-shell Mountain) is a karmic mountain shaped like a right-turning conch; or it is called Stong ri (Thousand Mountain) as it is surrounded by 1,000 small mountains.

Stong ru '1,000 soldiers' is used by Dge 'dun chos 'phel (1920-1951) who writes (1990:286) that in the year 659, this area was the site of a battle during which 1,000 Tibetan soldiers defeated a Chinese army of 80,000. Da rgyal mang po rje, the Tibetan military commander, was killed during this conflict and his spirit became Dar rgyal Mountain Deity (discussed later).

Local informants cannot explain the origin of Stong ri Mountain Deity—although it is generally agreed that it is a female deity who has much treasure as indicated by her name, Gter gyi bdag po 'Lord of Treasure'.⁸

A picture displayed on the *lab tse* altar⁹ depicts Stong ri with a compassionate feminine white face, riding a white horse, wearing a red Buddhist shawl over a blue robe, holding a blazing jewel (*nor bu me 'bar*) in her right hand, a jewel (*nor bu*) in her left hand, and carrying a bow-case and quiver of arrows.

⁸ She is not referred to as *bdag mo*, the feminine form of *bdag po*.

⁹ A square stone frame wall (with sides ten meters long and three meters high) holds *mda'* offered to the deities. Photographs of *thang ka* of the three deities are displayed in the small box in the front wall.

When the author visited Tsha phug Village in 1999,¹⁰ a Tibetan area fifty kilometers west of Mount Stong ri, local elders said that Stong ri is a Salar mountain deity. Salar live adjacent to Stong ri. Tsha phug residents refer to the mountain as Salar Dung ri dkar po 'White Conch-shell Mountain of the Salar', and believe it is still growing. They contend that Rdo sbis Tibetans were oppressed by this mountain deity and consequently the reincarnate lama Gser khang pa blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1840-1908) built a *dus 'khor* (Kalachakra) stupa to limit its growth.¹¹

Stong ri g.yu mtsho (Stong ri Turquoise Lake; Mengda Tianchi), located in a forested valley north of Mount Stong ri, is considered a sacred lake belonging to Stong ri Mountain Deity. Local Tibetans visit it in summer, beseech the deities for wealth, burn *bsang*, and circumambulate the lake.

Dar rgyal

Tshe tan zhabs drung (1987:790) describes Mount Dar rgyal:

A myes¹² Dar rgyal, the high rocky mountain shaped like a three-folded *nor bu*, where Dar rgyal dgung blon spun gsum (the Three Brother Key Ministers of the empire) are said to dwell.

¹⁰ Tsha phug (Chafu) Tibetan Township, Hualong Hui Autonomous County, Qinghai Province.

¹¹ This stupa is in Dkyil shar Tibetan Village, Shong zhan (Xiongxiang) Township, Hualong Hui Autonomous County. Rnye blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan and Blo bzang bstan pa rgya mtsho note the construction of this stupa but do not mention it preventing Stong ri's growth (1996:150-154).

¹² A *myes* 'grandfather' or 'ancestor' is applied to the local mountain deity, as is the case with A myes rma chen, whom Mgo log people believe is their ancestor.

The author omits the names of the other two 'brothers'. '*Spun*', as used in this context, refers to 'comrades' and not biological 'brothers'. Dar rgyal spun gsum 'Three Dar rgyal Brothers' is commonly used locally. Locals know no other name for the brothers. Local accounts suggest Dar rgyal was a Chinese general born during the Zhou Dynasty (1050 BC-256 BC).

Bka' ma mkha' 'bum attempts to connect Dar rgyal to a reference in a Dunhuang manuscript, but local people are unaware of the following account (2009:30-31):

In 659 A.D., the Tibetan military commander, Da rgyal mang po rje, was killed in war when 1,000 Tibetan soldiers defeated a Chinese army of 80,000 in Mtsho nag stong ru 'Black Lake Stong ru'. His soldiers built a tomb for him on Mount Dar rgyal. His soul then resided in Mount Dar rgyal and became Dar rgyal Mountain Deity.

Dar rgyal is represented riding a white horse and clad in white clothing. He wears a sharp-tipped felt hat. Dge bsnyen phying dkar ba¹³ and A myes rma chen mountain deities wear similar hats.

In the picture displayed in the wall of the *lab tse* altar, Dar rgyal wears white clothing, armor, and a yellow felt hat. He holds a spear in his right hand and a jewel in his left. He is mounted on a red horse.

An informant said that Dar rgyal was a *dge bsnyen* or *upasaka*¹⁴ during the Chinese Zhou Dynasty, was good-hearted, and very kind to people. He is commonly called Dar rgyal dge bsnyen chen mo 'Great Upasaka Dar rgyal'.

The only Han Chinese village in Rdo sbis is Rgya mkhar (Qitaibao). Village ancestors are locally said to have migrated from present-day Zhejiang Province in south China during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and brought their

¹³ See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:161-165) for more on Dge bsnyen phying dkar ba.

¹⁴ A layman or laywoman who has sworn to not kill, lie, steal, take intoxicants, and engage in sexual misconduct.

local deity, Chang Yutian, with them, who then dwelt on Mount Dar rgyal and became the mountain deity of the area. The shrine-keeper refused a request in 2008 to photograph the deity displayed in the Rgya mkhar Village shrine on the grounds that this deity is wrathful, narrow-minded, and dislikes disturbances. He added that Chang Yutian is quick to respond to requests for help and makes trouble for those who do not keep promises of making offerings after being helped.

A small, sacred lake located atop Dar rgyal Mountain is thought to contain much grain and treasure and is regarded as Dar rgyal's property. Rdo sbis inhabitants, mostly young men and women, climb steep paths to visit the lake on the seventeenth day of the sixth month of the Chinese lunar calendar,¹⁵ two days after the Rdo sbis *lab tse* ceremony. Once at the lake, they burn *bsang*, and throw *gter khug* 'treasure bags'¹⁶ and coins into the lake as offerings to the deity. It is believed such offerings bring prosperity and good fortune to one's family. The author witnessed hundreds of young people, many of them middle school students hoping to pass school exams, enroute to the lake in 2008.

Mountain deities are often viewed as male and lakes near them are seen as their female consorts (Karmay 1998:432). However, this is not the case for the female Stong ri and the male Dar rgyal. The lakes near them are considered to be their property.

Gung ye

Tshe tan zhabs drung (1987:790) writes, "The (Mountain) A myes Gu'u ye,¹⁷ where the empire's brave minister Nian Gengyao('s spirit) dwells." Nian (1679?-1726) was a Qing Dynasty Chinese general during the reign of the Yongzheng

¹⁵ Local Tibetans use the Chinese lunar calendar.

¹⁶ Small, closed white cloth bags containing approximately one kilo of wheat or barley grain.

¹⁷ 'Gu'u ye' is a local Tibetan term used for Gung ye.

emperor (1723-1736). During Nian's lifetime, his troops destroyed several monasteries in the Mtsho sngon area in the course of quelling rebellion.¹⁸ Nian was aware of information that convinced him Yongzheng's enthronement was inappropriate.¹⁹ Eventually, Yongzheng ordered his execution. Afterwards, Nian's spirit returned to the emperor's palace, appeared in the emperor's dreams, and intimidated him. Subsequently, the Imperial Preceptor, Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje (1717-1786), subjugated the spirit.²⁰

According to a *bsang*-offering text²¹ dedicated to Gung ye and commonly chanted in 'Dod rtse Village and, according to two *thang ka* in 'Dod rtse Village Temple, A myes Gung ye Mountain Deity has a brown scowling face and wide-open eyes with knitted eyebrows. He brandishes a spear adorned with a red flag in his right hand and wears armor and a helmet decorated with a plume of vulture feathers or with flags. He carries a tiger-skin bow-case and a leopard-skin quiver. He rides a white horse and is extolled as

¹⁸ Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma (1989:77).

¹⁹ Emperor Kangxi (1645-1722) left a letter read after his death, commanding that his fourteenth son succeed him. However, Yongzheng, the fourth son, and his followers managed to change the Chinese characters reading "the fourteenth son" to "the fourth son" and subsequently, Yongzheng succeeded the throne. Later, Yongzheng ordered the execution of those who knew of this event in fear of it being revealed. Spence (2010) writes, "General Nian Gengyao, once the emperor's favorite but driven at the end to commit suicide on the emperor's order."

²⁰ Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma (1989:16). The author does not give the accounts of subjugation in this biography of Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje. However, stories of several successive previous lives of this Imperial Preceptor who subjugated Nian's previous lives that were harmful beings are given.

²¹ A handwritten copy of this text was consulted in 'Dod rtse Village.

the general of 10,000 soldiers. One of his eight sons is Dgra 'dul nor bu. His wife is Rgya bza' mon sde yum chen drag mo.²²

In another picture, Gung ye has a long thin moustache and a beard, rides a red horse, grips a broadsword in the right hand, and wears a sleeveless leopard skin over a red shirt.

A mountain deity may have a genealogical relationship with the people they protect, is usually depicted as a traditional warrior, and is worshiped as a protective ancestor or ancestral deity. However, there are notable variations for the three Rdo sbis mountains. Although the title *A myes* is applied, local mountain deities are worshiped as protectors, not as ancestors or ancestral deities.

TERRITORY AND MOVEMENT OF MOUNTAIN DEITIES

Each of the three mountain deities has its own territory and adherents. Attempts to invade the territory of the others is deemed provocative and may lead to conflict between the mountain deities involved. The following account of a conflict between Gung ye and Stong ri illustrates this:

Stong ri g.yu mstho, a small lake north of Mount Stong ri, was once at the foot of Mount Gung ye and belonged to Gung ye Mountain Deity. Stong ri stole the lake, which resulted in endless hostility between the two. Traces of this event are evident in notches atop Mount Stong ri that are believed to be scars left by Gung ye's arrows and the fact that Gung ye is a rocky mountain that boulders tumble down, explained by Stong ri having clawed Gung ye's face. This further suggests that Stong ri is female because

²² Rgya bza' = Chinese princess.

women scratch when they fight.²³

Mountain deities travel swiftly around the earth at great speed. A long song from Rdo sbis area known as *Ra ru mkho a bo khro skyabs 'bum*, sung in 1998 by Tshe go (1905-?), a local woman, narrates the hardships of mountain deities. The song mentions a local businessman who was killed by robbers on the way home. His spirit later became a mountain deity as illustrated by the following:

I (Mountain Deity) wear out a pair of metal boots in the
daytime,
I wear out a pair of stirrups every night.
I wear out a suit of clothes within a month,
And my horse wears out its hooves within a year.

A mountain deity is thought to come at great speed when his adherents request help, as illustrated by the following account:

Once a mountain deity was called by an adherent and found upon arrival that the person's problem was constipation. The mountain deity later complained, "You can't go everywhere you are asked for help. Sometimes you are even asked to help with constipation!"

However, not every mountain deity is so responsive, as this account illustrates:

A lags bzang po, a reincarnate lama from Reb gong (Tongren), visited Mount Putuo (Putuoshan) in Zhejiang Province and became involved in a dispute between two powerful Chinese groups. One group detained him. He summoned Reb gong's mountain deities but none

²³ This and other local accounts lacking specific references are narratives the author has heard that are widely told in the local area.

responded. Finally, he summoned Dar rgyal. Dar rgyal replied immediately that he would soon come. A short while later, a bomb exploded outside the prison, blowing a hole in the prison wall through which he escaped. A lags bzang po offered *bsang* to show his appreciation to this mountain deity when he got home.

Other accounts suggest that mountain deities are limited by the distance that they may be asked to travel. A local monk offered this account:

When a person risks their life crossing the China/ Nepal border, they summon the local mountain deity for assistance. However, no indications of the local mountain deity helping them are apparent at that very moment. However, if they summon a local *chos skyong* or *darmapala* (Buddhist protector), it does help. This means it is difficult for mountain deities in their native A mdo to reach distant Dbus gtsang to help their adherents.

This fact was confirmed by a worried family that invited a *lha ba* 'spirit medium'²⁴ to their home to learn about a relative who had gone south. The mountain deity spoke through the *lha ba* saying that he had already escorted the person all the way to A mdo County, Tibet Autonomous Region, and had then returned.

RDO SBIS *LAB TSE* RITUAL

The *lab tse* consists of stones around a wood frame into which are inserted *mda'*, birch tree branches adorned with colorful wool pieces, and colorful cloth printed with *rlung rta* and scriptures. It is an offering site to mountain deities. *Lab tse* are usually found on mountaintops and ridges and more rarely at the foot of a mountain and edges of cultivated

²⁴ The only local spirit medium we were aware of in 2010 was in 'Ong rgyal Village.

fields.

People explain *lab tse* function in various ways. Stuart et al. (1995) and Xing (1992) have suggested that *lab tse* may trace their origins to Tibetan troops passing by long ago constructing wooden frames for holding their weapons and Tibetan soldiers building them atop mountains as signs of control after occupying new territory. The Tibetan Kingdom disintegrated in the ninth century, and there were frequent battles between tribes. To maintain peace and restore friendly relationships between tribes, weapons were collected and put on summits in plain view to show that there was credible peace between tribes, and were also built to store the weapons mountain deities could use in battles.

Dpal ldan bkra shis and Stuart (1998) suggest that because mountain deities drift around the earth several times a day, the *lab tse* are their dwellings and places to make offerings to them. This is also confirmed by informant Grags pa who said that the mountain deities travel at great speed around the earth three times a day. The *lab tse* are a place to rest during their tiring travel.

Lab tse are also believed to be the palaces of mountain deities, who are often military commanders and fond of weapons, thus *mda'* are ideal offerings. Shouting, shooting guns, setting off firecrackers, and horseraces are enjoyed by mountain deities.

Dge 'dun chos 'phel (1990:221-222) contended that *btsan* were images of ancient kings and insightfully suggests:

Imitating the Red Palace (Pho brang dmar po)²⁵ with arrows and spears adorned on top built by Khri btsun,²⁶ red temples adorned with spears and arrows and *labtse* (*la rtse*) for residences of *btsan* deities were built.

²⁵ The red structure in the upper middle portion of the Potala Palace is said to be Srong btsan sgam po's (617-650) palace.

²⁶ Princess Bhrikuti Devi came from Nepal in 634 to marry Srong btsan sgam po.

A shared notion is that *lab tse* are a mountain deity's dwelling or post.

Origin of the Rdo sbis *lab tse*

Rdo sbis *lab tse* was built in 1989. Earlier, the three mountain deities were venerated and rituals were held separately: the upper villages in the east held a *lab tse* festival for Dar rgyal every summer; villages in the south had their own *lab tse* altars and annual rituals for Gung ye; and villages in the north had *lab tse* altars and rituals for Stong ri. There were three *lab tse* altars for Gung ye in 'Dod rtse Village in the south. Rituals were done for each annually and a sheep was sacrificed to the mountain deity.

In 1989, a unified ritual for the three most important local mountain deities mentioned above began. This *lab tse* serves the twenty-four Tibetan villages in Rdo sbis, therefore the *lab tse* altar or the *lab tse* ritual is called the Rdo sbis *lab tse*. It is also called Rdo sbis *spyi mda'* 'the collected (or community) arrows of Rdo sbis', emphasizing the unity of the deities and the unity of the communities

Stong ri, Dar rgyal, and Gung ye are believed to be immigrants and not sincerely dedicated to the local area for they often recall their native homes. Moreover, these mountain deities were at odds and frequently fought. Their devotees, the local people, were thus often in conflict. As a result, establishing unity and harmony between the local mountain deities appeared paramount and, in the early twentieth century, certain enthusiastic local worthies discussed the possibility of establishing a collective *lab tse* for the three mountain deities. Shes rab rgya mtsho (1884-1968), a Buddhist scholar born in the region, composed two parallel articles dedicated to the three local mountain deities—*The bsang Offering Ritual to Rdo sbis's Three Powerful Deities Stong Dar Gung* (1982:48) and *The Celestial Drink Offering Ritual to Rdo sbis's Three Powerful Deities Stong Dar Gung* (1982:52). The author writes (1982:51, 55) at the

end of both articles: "If a collective *lab tse* is established for the three deities, it will bring great harmony to all residents in Rdo sbis, both monks and laymen."

This suggestion was unrealized until 1989, when the reincarnate lama, Gung thang dkon mchog bstan pa'i dbang phyug (1926-2000), one of two abbots of Bla brang Monastery, was invited to supervise the project. Gung thang Rinpoche chose the site and the date for the *lab tse* ritual—the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. The first ritual, dedicated to Stong ri, Dar rgyal, and Gung ye, was performed that year with Gung thang Rinpoche presiding. Beginning in the second year, the date was changed to the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month because people are busy harvesting in the eighth lunar month.

The Ritual

Almost every household prepares an arrow or tree branches in advance. Every village also prepares a *spyi mda'* 'community arrow'. People gather at the *lab tse* on the morning of the appointed day. Women and children come empty-handed and participate only as spectators. Men carry *mda'*. Nearly everyone wears Tibetan clothing and participates as a member of their village. The number of participants and the number and quality of *mda'* collectively symbolize a village. Villages compete to be the best in both categories. Contributing *mda'* and participation in this ritual are seen as obligatory.

The ritual is organized by a group of approximately eight local people that includes one or two revered monks, respected older men with organizational experience, and one or two representatives from the local township government. Several monks chant and prepare *gtor ma* 'sacrificial cakes' for the mountain deities.

Arrows are inserted into the *lab tse* altar and a huge *bsang* offering is burned before the *lab tse*. Meanwhile, thousands of *rlung rta*, a symbol of good fortune, are tossed

into the air while men shout "*Lha rgyal lo* Victory to the Deities!" to summon the mountain deities to give glory, honor, fame, prosperity, power, and progeny to those assembled.

This ritual is completed in a morning and is followed by the activities mentioned. This collection of activities lasts two or three days.

CONCLUSION

Locals believe that establishment of this collective *lab tse* improved the relationship between local people and between the three mountain deities, and that the three mountain deities are now more dedicated to the local area. This is illustrated by the belief that Rdo sbis is developing in positive ways, for example, children are obtaining more education through the state school system, more local people are able to obtain paid employment outside the area, and so on.

Rdo sbis mountain deities are asked to protect humans, livestock, and crops and to resolve conflicts between villages. When a dispute arises between two villages sharing a single mountain deity, the latter is believed to assist the village that offers the most sacrifices.

Lab tse are also recognized landmarks. During grassland conflicts, *lab tse* are accepted as territorial markers, which explains the importance a village attaches to a *lab tse* as a boundary marker in the annual *lab tse* ritual for the mountain deity.

Mountain deities are a vibrant part of every local Tibetan's consciousness. They are protective deities that, if properly served, can aid an individual in times of great physical need in this life. These deities were also historically accessible through local spirit mediums and thus embody aspects of Tibetanness in terms of how they are visualized and depicted that transcend time and space. The *lab tse* ritual thus provides an opportunity for each participant, with the

entire local community, to rejoice in beseeching and appeasing the mountain deities—a powerful reaffirmation of Tibetan identity.

By participating in the ritual as a part of the larger community, people renew a sense of responsibility for the community. Karmay (1998:429) writes that:

Participation in such a ritual therefore implies total integration into the community: this in turn implies inherited social and political obligation, moral and individual responsibility, and an affirmation of communal and national solidarity in the face of external aggression. By the same token, internal conflict and disunity engender the withdrawal of the deity's favor which affect the power and prosperity of the community.

There is a sense that when the status of an individual in the local community improves, the entire community also benefits, and that an individual may not become prosperous and powerful without increasing the fortune of the entire community.

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维茨 [de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R]. 1993. *Xizang de
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Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma ལའང་སྐལ་རོལ་པའི་ར་འཇེ་ལི་རྣམ་ཐར་ ལྷང་སྐལ་རོལ་པའི་
དོན་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་མཐུན་ [Biography of Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo
rje]. Lan kru'u [Lanzhou] ལན་ཀྲུ་: Kan su'u mi rigs
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Nationalities Press].

Tshe tan zhab drung ཚེ་ཏན་འབས་བྱུང་. 1987. *Rje 'jigs med rigs
pa'i blo gros kyi gsung rtsom pod dang po རྗེ་འཇེ་གསལ་
མེད་རིགས་པའི་སྒྲོ་ཤོས་ཀྱི་གསུང་རྩིས་དང་དོན་པོ་ [Rje 'jigs
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[Xining]: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang མཚོ་
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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

,

'Dan ma འདན་མ

'Dod rtse འདོད་རྩེ

'Gyur med འགྱུར་མེད

'O po che འོ་པོ་ཆེ

'Obs dmar འོབས་དམར

'Obs dmar mdo འོབས་དམར་མདོ

'Ong rgyal འོང་རྒྱལ

A

A lags bzang po ཨ་ལགས་བཟང་པོ

A mdo ཨ་མདོ

A myes ཨ་མྱེས

A myes rma chen ཨ་མྱེས་རྒྱ་ཆེན

B

bdag mo བདག་མོ

Bis ri བིས་རི

Bka' ma mkha' 'bum བཀའ་མ་མཁའ་འབུམ

Bkra rdzas བཀྲ་རྩམ

Bla brang ལྷ་བྲང

Bla ma'i lung ba ལྷ་མའི་ལུང་བ

Blo bzang bstan pa rgya mtsho ལྷོ་བཟང་བསྟན་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོ

Bon བོན

Bong rgya བོང་རྒྱ

Bsam tshang བསམ་མཚང

bsang བསང

btsan བཅན

C

Chafu 查甫

Chang Yutian 昌玉田

chos skyong ཆོས་སྒྱུང་

D

Da rgyal mang po rje དར་རྒྱལ་མང་པོ་རྗེ་

Daowei 道伟

Dar rgyal དར་རྒྱལ་

Dar rgyal dge bsnyen chen mo དར་རྒྱལ་དགེ་བསྟན་ཆེན་མོ་

Dar rgyal dgung blon spun gsum དར་རྒྱལ་དགུང་བློན་སྤུན་གསུམ་

Dar rgyal spun gsum དར་རྒྱལ་སྤུན་གསུམ་

Dbus gtsang དབུས་གཙང་

Dge 'dun chos 'phel དགེ་འདུན་ཆོས་འཕེལ་

Dge bsnyen phying dkar ba དགེ་བསྟན་ཕྱིང་དཀར་བ་

dge bsnyen དགེ་བསྟན་

Dgra 'dul nor bu དག་འདུལ་ནོར་བུ་

Dgu rus དགུ་རུས་

Dkyil shar དཀྱིལ་ཤར་

Dmag dpon དམག་དཔོན་

Dpal ldan bkra shis དཔལ་ལྷན་བཀྲ་ཤིས་

Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las ཏུང་དཀར་བློ་བཟང་འཕྲིན་ལས་

Dung ri ཏུང་རི་

Dung ri dkar po ཏུང་རི་དཀར་པོ་

dus 'khor ཏུས་འཁོར་

G

Gansu 甘肃

Gdong sna གདོང་སྐྱ་

Gesang Nuobu 格桑诺布

Grag pa གྲག་པ་

Gser khang pa blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho གསེར་ཁང་པ་

སྒོ་བཟང་བཟླ་འཛིན་ཀྱི་མཚོ་

Gshong ba གཤོང་བ་

Gter gyi bdag po གཏེར་གྱི་བདག་པོ་

Gter kha lung གཏེར་ཁ་ལུང་

gter khug གཏེར་ཁུག་

gtor ma གཏོར་མ་

Gung thang dkon mchog bstan pa'i dbang phyug གུང་ཐང་

དགོན་མཚོག་བཟླ་པའི་དབང་ཕུག་

Gung ye གུང་ཡེ་

Guoluo 果洛

gye tu གྱེ་ཏུ་

gzhi bdag གཞི་བདག་

H

Hor grol ba ཧོར་གྲོལ་བ་

Hor ron po ཧོར་རོན་པོ་

K

Kangxi 康熙

Khis dmar ཁིས་དམར་

Khri btsun ཁྲི་བཙུན་

L

la btsas ལ་བཙས་

la gzhas ལ་གཞས་

la rtse ལ་རེ་

lab tse ལ་བ་ཙེ་

Lcang shar ལུང་ཤར་

lha ba ལྷ་བ་

lha rgyal lo ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ལོ་

Long Keduo 隆可多

M

mda' མདའ

Mdan ma མདན་མ

Mdan ma mchod rten kha མདན་མ་མཚན་རྟེན་ཁ

Mdo ba མདོ་བ

Mengda tianchi 孟达天池

Mgo log མགོ་ལོག

Ming Dynasty 明朝

Mtsho nag stong ru མཚོ་ནག་སྟོང་རུ

Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྟོན

N

Ngo ma རོ་མ

Nian Gengyao 年羹尧

nor bu རོར་བུ

nor bu me 'bar རོར་བུ་མེ་འབར

Nya mo ཉ་མོ

Nyin pa ཉིན་པ

P

Pho brang dmar po ཐོ་བྲང་དམར་པོ

Putaoshan 普陀山

Q

Qinghai 青海

Qitaibao 起台堡

R

Ra skor ར་སྐོར

Rdo sbis རོ་སྤེས

Rdo sbis grwa tshang རོ་སྤེས་གྲ་ཚང

Reb gong རེབ་གོང

Rgya bza' mon sde yum chen grags mo རྒྱ་བཟའ་མོན་སྡེ་ཡུམ་ཆེན་

གྲགས་མོ

Rgya mkhar རྒྱ་མཁར་

Rgyal tshang རྒྱལ་ཚང་

Rin chen tshe ring རིན་ཅེན་ཚེ་རིང་

rlung rta རླུང་རྟ་

Rnye blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan རྟེ་ལྟོ་བཟང་བསྟན་པའི་

རྒྱལ་མཚན་

rtsam pa རུས་པ་

Rtsi rkyang རུ་རྒྱུང་

S

Sala (Salar) 撒拉

Sde sman སྡེ་སྨན་

Ser grong སེར་གྲོང་

Shaanxi 陕西

Shes rab rgya mtsho ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་

Shong zhan ཤོང་ཇན་

Skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ་

skyes lha སྟེས་ལྷ་

Sprel lung སྤྲེལ་ལུང་

spyi mda' སྤྱི་མདའ་

Srong btsan sgam po སྟོང་བཅན་སྐམ་པོ་

Stong ru སྟོང་རུ་

Stod ra སྟོད་ར་

Stong ri སྟོང་རི་

Stong ri g.yu mstho སྟོང་རི་གཡུ་མཚོ་

T

thang ka ཐང་ཀ

Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma ཐུ་འུ་བཀྲ་ན་ཚོས་ཀྱི་ཉི་མ

Tongren 同仁

Tsha phug ཚ་ཕུག

Tshe go ཚེ་གོ

Tshe tan zhabs drung ཚེ་ཏན་ཞབས་རྩུང

X

Xiahe 夏河

Xiongxian 雄先

Xunhua 循化

Y

Yongzheng 雍正

yul lha ཡུལ་ལྷ

Z

Zam tshang ཟམ་ཚང

Zhang zhung རང་ཅུང

Zhejiang 浙江

Zhou Dynasty 周朝